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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, June 24, 1935.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Notes on Meat Prices." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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If you are interested in the cost of the meat you eat -- and most housekeepers are, here's news direct from the Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C., that you'll want to hear -- news that will answer the question so many people have been asking lately: "Why have meat prices gone up so?"

Well, the men who have been studying this matter tell me that an unusual coincidence accounts for the rise in meat prices. Last summer's weather and this year's purse-strings have combined to make the family meat bill go up. You see, it has just happened that right at the time when the meat supplies in this country were low, people began to have more money to spend on meat. To quote the words of the economists: "The rise in meat prices this year is due to the marked decrease in supplies of meat available for consumption and some increase in consumer buying power."

You remember that record drought we had last summer, don't you? If you didn't have experience with it yourself, at least you heard plenty about it. Well, that drought is mainly responsible for the present low supplies of meat. You see, many feed crops were burned up last summer, particularly corn which both hogs and slaughter cattle need to be "finished" as the meat people say. The result naturally has been that during the first four months of 1935 the amount of meat available from federally-inspected slaughter of livestock was 27 per cent smaller than in the corresponding period a year earlier. Meat supplies grew low just when the income of industrial workers showed a rise -- an increase of 11 per cent over last year.

You and I and other people concerned with grocery bills have felt the rise in the cost of beef and pork most. That's not surprising because these are our two most important meats and their prices have gone up noticeably lately. But perhaps you'll be somewhat reconciled about these prices, if you go over the figures and notice that during the first four months of the year, these prices were either lower than usual or just average. During January, February, March and April just passed retail beef prices were actually 15 per cent below the average price of beef of the last five years. As for pork, the price of pork has been just equal to the average.

The greatest reduction in meat supplies has been in pork which ordinarily makes up half of the American meat diet. Pork supplies during the first four months of this year were 38 per cent less than in the same period last year, and 43 per cent below the average of the past five years. This great shortage of pork undoubtedly has had much to do with the rise in beef prices. Another reason for high prices is that the better grades of beef have been scarcer than usual.

Last month meat supplies were unusually low. About half as many hogs were slaughtered in May 1935 as in May 1934. And slaughter of cattle and calves in May was about 15 per cent less than that of a year ago. You can see how this affects the amount of beef and veal on the market and incidentally the price. Beef, you see, makes up about forty per cent of our meat diet and veal about five.

As we said a moment ago, the better grades of beef are much scarcer on the market than usual. The shortage in feed caused the general quality of the cattle slaughtered this year to be much below average and it also cut down the number of well-finished cattle. The large cities, especially those in the East, prefer steer beef to cow beef and use it much more extensively. Well, this year the proportion of steer beef has been much smaller than usual. The number of steers slaughtered during the first four months of this year was about 28 per cent smaller than a year ago -- the smallest for the fifteen years on record. But the number of cows and heifers was fifteen per cent larger than during the same period last year -- in fact, the largest on record.

After all this talk about beef and pork, it's time we mentioned lamb. Wise housekeepers lately have been serving this meat to their families because lamb prices have advanced very little this year. Relatively large supplies are on the market. The slaughter of sheep and lambs last month was about 28 per cent greater than in May a year ago, and 13 per cent greater than the five-year average for the month. Generally mutton and lamb make up only five per cent of our meat diet. And generally people living on the Atlantic or the Pacific coasts are the ones who eat the most. As the economists state it: "Mutton and lamb are used mostly in the eastern seaboard states and on the Pacific Coast."

Now here's a tip for the household shopper. During the hot weather that often arrives toward the last of June or the first of July an unusually large supply of spring lamb is likely to appear on the market with consequent lower prices. So right along now keep your eye out for bargain sales in lamb. Here's the time to feature a Sunday roast of lamb for a change from your usual fried chicken or beef roast. Nothing better than cold sliced lamb for supper on a hot Monday night either especially if you serve it with a cool-looking jellied vegetable salad. Here's the time also to feature lamb chops broiled over the picnic fire.

By the way, the success of a lamb meal depends partly on the way you cook your lamb and partly on what you serve with it. Most people enjoy something tart or spicy with lamb. So favorite relishes are: mint sauce, mint jelly, currant jelly, guava jelly, horseradish sauce and all sorts of spiced conserves and pickles. A tart green salad also is a big help to a lamb meal -- crisp garden lettuce with . . . French dressing, perhaps; or a grapefruit and lettuce salad; or tomato, cucumber and lettuce. Some people like a tomato aspic salad with lamb. With cold lamb try a delicately colored green mint gelatin with cucumber slices molded in it.

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